



State of Connecticut

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February 23, 2023 * 11:00am * 2A and Zoom

Testimony in Support of **Proposed HB 5434 AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGULATION OF CANNABIS.**

Dear Chairs Maroney and D'Agostino, Ranking Members Cicarella and Rutigliano, and distinguished members of the General Law Committee:

Thank you so much for hearing my testimony today. This is a large and important bill – my testimony will focus on two elements- the labeling requirement (lines 4-7) and the driver education requirement (Lines 18-22).

Cannabis use, particularly for the young, poses serious health risks, ranging from increased risk of schizophrenia and psychosis, breathing issues, and for pregnant and nursing women, risks of lower birth weights, preterm birth, (and abnormal neurological development (<https://www.samhsa.gov/marijuana/marijuana-pregnancy>)). Users of cannabis who drive while impaired also pose a threat to other road users and pedestrians. Accordingly, cannabis products should convey appropriate warning labels, similar to those in Canada, where rotating health warnings are set against a bright-yellow background, use black 12-point type, and take up a third of the package front. Proposed Californian legislation suggests the following warnings and Connecticut should follow suit and include specific mention of the increased risks of psychosis and schizophrenia as well as the dangers of addiction with prolonged and heavy cannabis use.

“WARNING: The smoke from cannabis is harmful. Toxic and carcinogenic chemicals found in tobacco smoke such as polyaromatic hydrocarbons, aromatic amines, and N-heterocyclics are also found in cannabis smoke.

WARNING: Do not use if pregnant or breastfeeding. Substances in cannabis are transferred from the mother to child and can harm your baby.

WARNING: Do not drive or operate heavy equipment after using cannabis. Cannabis can cause drowsiness and impair your ability to concentrate and make quick decisions.

WARNING: Frequent and prolonged use of cannabis containing THC can contribute to mental health problems over time. Daily or near-daily use increases the risk of dependence and may bring on or worsen disorders related to anxiety and depression.

WARNING: Adolescents and young adults are at greater risk of harms from cannabis. Daily or near-daily use over a prolonged period of time can harm brain development and function.

WARNING: The higher the THC content of a product, the more likely you are to experience adverse effects and greater levels of impairment. THC can cause anxiety and impair memory and concentration.

WARNING: It can take up to 4 hours to feel the full effects from eating or drinking cannabis.

Consuming more within this time period can result in adverse effects that may require medical attention.

WARNING: The effects from eating or drinking cannabis can be long-lasting. The effects can last between 6 and 12 hours following use.”

(<https://khn.org/news/article/california-marijuana-warning-labels/>)

In 2022, traffic fatalities in Connecticut jumped 25% to 380, from 303 the previous year, according to the Connecticut Crash Data Repository at UConn, a joint venture between the university and the state transportation department. With legalization of retail marijuana, law enforcement in the state is warning of the potential for increased injury and death. Unfortunately, studies show that marijuana users greatly overestimate their ability to drive safely and will typically take the wheel well before it is safe to do so. “In a placebo-controlled parallel study of regular cannabis users smoking cannabis with different THC content ad libitum, there was statistically significant worsening on driving simulator performance in the THC group compared with the placebo group. A lack of insight regarding driving impairments, particularly at 90 minutes, is of concern, given that users will likely self-evaluate when they feel safe to drive. Although performance was improving at 3.5 hours, recovery was not fully seen until 4.5 hours post use.”(<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2788264>)

Teen drivers, who are statistically much more likely to be involved in accidents, are particularly at risk. In addition to the known dangers associated with young drivers, youth perception of the dangers of marijuana use is decreasing and use is increasing. “Approximately 43% of young adults reported past-year marijuana use in 2021, a significant increase from 34% in 2016 and 29% in 2011. Use in the past month or daily use (defined as on 20 or more occasions within the past 30 days) also reached historic levels, with past-month use reported by 29% of young adults (compared with 21% in 2016 and 17% in 2011) and daily use reported by 11% of young adults (compared with 8% in 2016 and 6% in 2011). The levels of past-year, past-month, and daily use in 2021 were the highest levels documented since such trends were first measured in 1988.

Since 2017, the survey has also included marijuana vaping. Past-month marijuana vaping doubled from 6% in 2017 to 12% in 2021, after a significant dip in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

(<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama-health-forum/fullarticle/2796188?guestAccessKey=dba134b4-b5c3-4a85-bd80-38d214c12803>)

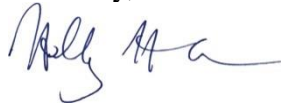
A 2020 survey conducted by Mothers against Drunk Driving found six in ten respondents do not consider driving while high to be a serious crime. Because adolescents’ cannabis use has risen and their overall perception that cannabis use is harmful has declined over the past two decades. ([Johnston et al., 2009](#)), the need for further education on its dangers is of paramount importance, to counter pro-marijuana messaging that abounds on social media and elsewhere.

So far Massachusetts is the only state that has included the risks of driving while under the influence of marijuana to their driver's ed curriculum. Massachusetts partnered with AAA Northeast, Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission, and Massachusetts' Registry of Motor Vehicles to produce the curriculum and included "Shifting Gears: The Blunt Truth about Marijuana and Driving", a video aimed at teaching drivers under the age of 18 the dangers of driving high. Connecticut should join our neighbor and include a similar module in our driver's education curriculum.

The proposed bill addresses a number of other issues and concerns that have arisen as a result of the commercialization of cannabis that are equally worthy of support. These include further steps to prevent accidental consumption by children, enhancing the ability of law enforcement to keep our roads safe from impaired drivers, and regulation of THC strength.

For the reasons stated in my testimony, I respectfully urge you to support Proposed HB 5434. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Holly Ma", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Holly Cheeseman
State Representative, 37th District
East Lyme, Montville, Salem